



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

SENATE BILL 366  
TRANSPORTATION - PASSENGER RAILROAD SERVICE LINES -  
CLOSURE OF MARC TRAIN STATIONS

TESTIMONY OF  
MICHAEL KNAPP  
COUNCILMEMBER, DISTRICT 2

BEFORE THE  
MARYLAND STATE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
MARYLAND STATE SENATE  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

FEBRUARY 8, 2006  
1:00 P.M.

**STATEMENT OF COUNCILMEMBER MIKE KNAPP  
REGARDING MTA'S RECOMMENDATION TO CLOSE  
DICKERSON AND BOYDS MARC TRAIN STATIONS**

**FEBRUARY 8, 2006**

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Mike Knapp, and I am the Montgomery County Councilmember representing District 2, and I regret that all of you are solidly on the spot – and that Secretary Flanagan, with his decision to close the Boyds and Dickerson MARC stations, has put you there.

I represent the area of Montgomery County in which both the Dickerson and Boyds MARC stations are located. As you can imagine, I was very disappointed and surprised to learn of MTA's decision to close these two stations. Not only was the county never brought into the decision-making process...not only is closing these stations when the Upcounty is straining at the seams for any form of mass transit extremely ill-advised...and not only was the Secretary's decision essentially *fait accompli*, regardless of the public hearings that were held, but frankly, I don't believe the Secretary has the authority to close these stations in the first place. In a nutshell, the Secretary is using authority he doesn't have to solve a problem that doesn't exist through a process that wasn't sincere.

Let me start with the first issue – that of making such a decision without the input of the county. Plainly put, MTA chose not to consult with anyone in county government – either in the executive or legislative branch -- before it recommended the closure of these stations. And once the proposal was made, the county was not formally notified of MTA's recommendation, learning instead of the recommendation through the media.

That was offensive enough in itself, but it gets worse. After announcing in December that it was recommending closing these stations, MTA held a public hearing in Barnesville on January 5, 2006, where I and many other residents testified to the critical need for MARC. MTA left the record open for public input until January 9 at 5 p.m. I can only guess that MTA houses a record number of speed readers and speed writers, because less than 24 hours of the 5p.m. deadline, MTA had issued its final decision. This suggested to me that MTA's decision to close these stations was pre-ordained, regardless of what it learned at the Barnesville hearing, thereby making a complete mockery of the hearing process.

I've written to the Secretary twice now to express my opposition both to his decision and to the process. And on January 31, I received a response from the Secretary that contained a number of baffling assertions that only continue to lead me to believe that MTA has no idea what it's talking about, and didn't learn a thing from the hearings.

First, the Secretary cites costs associated with installing ticking machines at these stations, calling them cost-prohibitive, and explaining that these machines are needed elsewhere. While I'm not sure I see the causal relationship between the costs of these machines and the need to close the stations, it was made clear at the public hearing that the majority of riders at these stations purchase their tickets elsewhere, and come to the station well prepared to travel on the train – just as they have for the last 20 years.

Next, he asserts that riders from Boyds or Dickerson can board instead at Germantown. The problem with such a recommendation, however, is that parking at Germantown is limited. While the Secretary explains that he would like to expand parking at Germantown – and that expanding the lot at Boyds or Dickerson is difficult – I believe the county could have worked with MTA to find an acceptable solution that didn't involve closing the Boyds and Dickerson stations. In fact, finding parking options for the Boyds and Dickerson stations would be critical to the growing community of Clarksburg, for which MARC is its major transit option.

So while the Secretary continues to be determined to close down the Boyds and Dickerson stations, there is some question as to whether he has the authority to do so. Section 7-902 of Maryland State Transportation Code, for example, "requires MTA" – I'm quoting here – "to operate passenger railroad services at a level of service at least equivalent to the level of service established as of July 1, 1981." I would argue that closing these two stations would directly inhibit the state's ability to provide service at the 1981 level.

Rail service has been a given in Montgomery County for nearly as long as railroads themselves have been around. Both Dickerson and Boyds have a history of railroad service dating back to the 1880s, when both towns were served by elegant brick and slate stations. Trains have been moving passengers back and forth between the city of Washington and the farmlands of Dickerson for more than a hundred years; the train station in Boyds was the dropping-off point for the rock that was hauled into the Upcounty so we could build some of the first roads in our area in the early 1900s.

But more than just tradition is at stake here.

The Upcounty region continues to grow in population at an astounding rate; therefore, it is imperative that we provide residents with more transit options for our residents to move in and around the county, not less. The Upcounty and its adjoining northern neighbors, such as Frederick County, are some of the fastest growing areas in Maryland. In Clarksburg alone, for instance, we expect nearly 40,000 new residents. Yet, over the last 3 ½ years – for as long as I have been a Councilmember – the state has made no progress on either the widening of the I-270, or the Corridor Cities Transitway – two projects that would provide Upcounty

residents with more alternatives to sitting in traffic. Given that the state has not invested in the I-270 or the Corridor Cities Transitway, then, it seems counterintuitive to reduce services on the MARC – the one transit alternative that is working. If anything, MTA should be recommending an *increase* in the number of stops at the Boyds and Dickerson stations, to make traveling by MARC more convenient and to encourage increased ridership.

One more thing: as the Councilmember representing the majority of Montgomery County's 93,000 acre Agricultural Reserve, I take very seriously the responsibility of ensuring we preserve our open space. That means reducing the demand for roads through open spaces or butted up against the reserve, just to move our residents from one area to another. Mass transit is one of the best ways to reduce the wear and tear on the Ag Reserve and other open spaces. MARC provides residents with an incredibly convenient, effective and comfortable way to help us continue our responsible stewardship of the ag reserve. The county needs all of its MARC stations – not just some – if we are to continue to offer commuters real options for getting back and forth.

We in the Upcounty ask for your help in our efforts to keep these stations open, and we appreciate the strong support you have shown so far. In particular, I want to thank Senator Garagiola and Delegate Cryor for their leadership in helping us get this done.

Let's keep the trains running on time – all of them.

Thank you.